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REACTIONS TO VARYING FORMS OF PARTICIPATION IN THE APPRAISAL INTERVIEW(U) TEXAS A AND M UNIV COLLEGE STATION M B DEGREGORIO ET AL. OCT 85 TR-ONR-3

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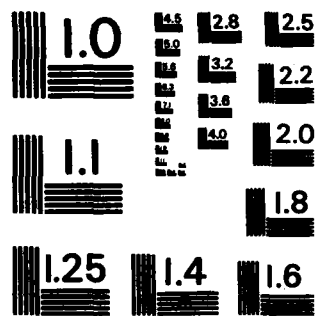
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INTERVIEW

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Cynthia D. Fisher

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Department of Psychology
Department of Management
Texas A&M University

Prepared for:
Office of Naval Research
800 North Quincy Street
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participative methods tended to result in more positive subordinate perceptions than the unilateral method, but no one particular participative technique was consistently the best.

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Reactions to Varying Forms of Participation in the Appraisal Interview

Research to date has clearly found that performance feedback is necessary in order to maintain and/or improve job performance (Catano, 1976; Erez, 1977; Kim & Hamner, 1976; Komaki; Barwick & Scott, 1978). However, little research has been conducted on how performance appraisal feedback can be conveyed to the ratee in a manner that ensures that the ratee will be satisfied with the process and will be motivated to act on the feedback. This paper will compare the impact of four different methods of providing feedback on ratee attitudes and subsequent performance.

Most of the studies relevant to this topic have been correlational field surveys, in which employee perceptions of the appraisal interview process are related to satisfaction with the interview and/or self-reported performance improvements after the interview. One such investigation was conducted by Dipboye & de Pontbriand (1981). These researchers administered questionnaires to employees who had received an appraisal in the past year. They concluded that positive employee perceptions of the appraisal interview were related to 1) discussion of plans and objectives in the interview, 2) perceived relevance of the performance measures, 3) favorability of the appraisal, and 4) opportunity to state one's own side in the appraisal interview. Greller (1975), utilizing a similar survey design, also found that the invitation to participate and opportunity to state one's own side were associated with feelings of being helped by the appraisal interview. Additional field surveys have confirmed that subordinate participation in appraisal discussion and goal-setting and perceived influence in the appraisal interview are positively related to employee satisfaction with the interview, the feedback source, and/or the perceived

helpfulness of the interview (Burke, Weitzel & Weir, 1978; Burke & Wilcox, 1969; Cederblom, 1982; Nemeroff & Wexley, 1979). These studies have also found that subordinate participation enhanced subsequent self-reported performance or reported motivation to improve.

The traditional alternative to participation, top-down supervisory feedback, has not fared so well in research. Kay, Meyer and French (1965) noted the detrimental effects of the critical, unilateral appraisal method in increasing defensiveness and actually reducing subsequent performance. A further disadvantage to supervisors as the sole source of feedback is that the information they provide may be seen as irrelevant or in error. Greller (1980) discovered that supervisors overestimated the importance of the feedback they provided and that subordinates placed more value and assigned greater credibility to feedback sources which were "closer" such as the task, themselves, and their co-workers.

The benefits of employee participation would seem to have been well documented. However, the studies discussed above draw their conclusions from correlational data. Furthermore, most of these studies used self-reported participation and performance measures. A critical test of these ideas would require that participation levels be manipulated and objective measures of performance be obtained.

In light of the problems associated with traditional supervisory feedback, some organizations have opted for more participative methods of providing performance feedback. Unfortunately, admonishing supervisors to act participatively may not be particularly effective in producing the desired results. Employee participation in the performance appraisal interview may be operationalized in many ways, from mere mention to total abdication of supervisory responsibility for the appraisal.

In this study, three variations on the "participative" appraisal will be delineated and compared to traditional top-down feedback. The first of these involves a simple invitation to the subordinate to participate in the appraisal by making comments and asking questions. The second involves use of a written self appraisal which is not specifically discussed in the participative interview, and the final condition consists of discussing and reconciling self and superior appraisals filled out prior to the interview.

Self-Appraisal and Performance Feedback

A self-appraisal instrument provides a vehicle through which subordinate participation in the feedback process can be ensured. It can also provide the subordinate with a way to state his/her opinion without feeling threatened (Bassett & Meyer, 1968; Kay, Meyer & French, 1965). However, the use of self-assessment on the job has received relatively little attention. Bassett and Meyer (1968) conducted one of the few studies, and one of the only field studies, investigating the role of the self-appraisal in the performance appraisal process. In their study the main responsibility for the performance review was placed in the hands of the subordinate. Subordinates were instructed to rate their own performance on a standard appraisal form, then to bring the completed form to the appraisal interview. Supervisors were directed not to accept the subordinates' self-ratings if they disagreed, but to insist they be modified until the manager was satisfied. Following the appraisal discussion both supervisor and subordinate were interviewed to determine their respective impressions of the performance feedback session. The results indicated that performance appraisal based on a self-review was more satisfying to managers and subordinates than manager-prepared appraisals. They also found that there was less defensiveness in appraisals based on self-review, as assessed by two

different measures of defensiveness. They concluded that there was a preponderance of evidence of both an objective and subjective variety that self-review appraisal interviews rather than manager-prepared forms resulted in: 1) a superior upward flow of information, in that the manager learned how the employee perceived his/her job responsibilities, 2) systematic thinking by the employee about his/her job and performance, 3) possible resolution or at least clarification of differences of opinion regarding job requirements and job performance. Although the self-appraisal has many positive aspects, there are some potential limitations to the exclusive use of a self-appraisal instrument in performance reviews and feedback discussion.

Disadvantages of the self-appraisal. Although Bassett and Meyer (1968) obtained positive results using a self-appraisal instrument, there was one clear drawback. Employees who had not previously participated in performance discussions were not satisfied with the self-appraisal approach. These employees stated that when supervisory appraisals were used, supervisor expectations were much clearer. These inexperienced employees appeared to want clarity and structure in the feedback session that the exclusive use of a self-appraisal instrument could not provide. Hillery and Wexley (1974) also found that participative appraisals were unsatisfying and relatively ineffective in changing behavior compared to top-down appraisals in a group of inexperienced trainees who expected and desired guidance from expert evaluators.

A second disadvantage associated with self-assessments is psychometric problems. Thornton's (1980) review concluded that self-appraisals over estimate skills and abilities, lack objectivity and reliability, and have less variability than supervisor-based assessments. For example, Meyer (1980) reported that 40% of employees, when asked to appraise themselves, placed themselves in the category, "one of the best - top 10%". His conclusion was

that most individuals have unrealistically favorable impressions of themselves. However, he also found that self-appraisals which would be revealed to one's superior in an appraisal interview tended to be more realistic than self appraisals given to the researcher in confidence.

A combined self/supervisory appraisal may be successful in minimizing the disadvantages of either approach alone. Clearly a formal self-appraisal would acquaint the ratee with the rating instrument and rating criteria and would require systematic thought on the quality of one's own performance according to these criteria. Input from the superior would provide the guidance desired by newer workers and help to control leniency error. Thus the best method for providing feedback in a participatory atmosphere might feature both self and superior assessments which are openly discussed in the appraisal interview.

However, instigation of systematic thinking may be sufficient in itself to enhance positive employee perceptions of the interview and subsequently motivate performance. It is not clear whether discussion of the ratings and resolution of disagreements with the superior is necessary. In fact, explicit discussion of self-ratings could conceivably trigger greater disagreement and defensiveness than in a less free-wheeling interview. In this study the effects of private self appraisal versus the effects of self appraisal plus open discussion of that appraisal will be assessed.

It was expected that all forms of participative feedback would result in more positive attitudes and perceptions on the part of the subordinate than top-down feedback. Specifically it was hypothesized that subordinate satisfaction, perceived feedback accuracy, and expectations of improving performance would be greatest in the participative conditions and that all forms of feedback would be superior to no feedback in terms of improving subsequent performance. In addition, a limited amount of literature indicated that use and

discussion of a self-appraisal might be an especially effective feedback technique because it guarantees that the subordinate has thought about his/her performance and requires active subordinate participation in the appraisal discussion. It is therefore tentatively hypothesized that the "joint" self and supervisory feedback method may be superior to all others.

Method

Subjects

One hundred thirty students served as subjects as part of a course requirement in introductory psychology. Of the 130 subjects, 22 served in a pretest, and 8 either did not return for a second performance session or provided data that was not useable. One hundred subjects were therefore included in the analyses (62 female, 38 male). Sixteen graduate and upper level undergraduate students (4 males, 12 females) served as evaluators and supervisors.

Procedure

Upon arrival at the experimental session, subjects were informed that they would be participating in an in-basket exercise. Introductory scripts were read which explained the task and subjects were allowed 60 minutes to work on the exercise. They then filled out several personality questionnaires (which served as a filler task) and a self-appraisal (depending on condition) while the assessor evaluated in-basket performance. Feedback sessions were then conducted (depending on condition), after which subjects were asked to complete a questionnaire regarding the performance feedback they had just received. Subjects returned for their second performance session one to three days later and completed the same in-basket exercise. No feedback was given after this session, subjects were simply debriefed and thanked for their participation.

Assessor Training

Assessors were provided with 3 hours of training regarding in-basket exercises, and were provided with a written guide to correct answers. Assessors who provided performance feedback received training specific to the condition to which they were assigned. This safeguard was taken to ensure that assessors would be unaware of the other experimental conditions. Assessors practiced conducting their assigned type of feedback discussion with the experimenter and with pilot subjects.

Design

Students were randomly assigned to 1 of 5 experimental conditions: 1) no feedback, 2) top-down feedback, 3) simple participative feedback, 4) self-appraisal with participative feedback, and 5) joint feedback.

In the no feedback condition subordinates received no feedback after they performed the in-basket exercise. In the top-down feedback condition, subordinates received feedback but were strongly discouraged from participating in the feedback session and were simply told how well or poorly they had performed on each dimension. In the simple participative feedback condition subordinates received performance feedback and were encouraged to participate in the feedback session. Assessors provided ratings for the subordinate and then solicited subordinate comments on these ratings. The self-appraisal participative feedback session was conducted much the same as the simple participative feedback condition. The only difference in this condition was that the subordinate had filled out a self-appraisal evaluating their own performance on the in-basket exercise, but which was not discussed in the feedback session. This condition served to test whether mere systematic thought regarding one's own performance was sufficient to affect the dependent measures or if the self-appraisal had to be discussed in the feedback session in order to

effective. In the joint feedback condition, the self-appraisal was explicitly discussed in the feedback session. The self- and supervisory appraisals were compared, discrepancies were reconciled, and a combined rating form was filled out. The assessors emphasized that they and the subordinate had equal roles in the appraisal process. Self-appraisal instruments were identical to the forms used by the assessors.

Measures

Satisfaction with feedback. Subjects' satisfaction with feedback was assessed using a three item scale developed by Nemeroff & Wexley (1979). A sample item is: I found the interview to be a satisfying experience. Coefficient alpha was .65 for this scale.

Perceived accuracy of feedback. Subjects' perceptions of the accuracy of feedback were assessed with a five item scale developed by Stone, Gueutal & McIntosh (1984). A sample item is: The feedback was consistent with how I felt I performed on the task. Coefficient alpha was .94 for this scale.

Expectations for improved performance. Subjects' expectations for performance improvements were assessed with a three item scale developed for this study. A sample item is: Given the in-basket again, I would do better. Coefficient alpha was .75 for this scale.

In-basket performance. Each in-basket item was assessed on four dimensions: 1) social flexibility, 2) organization and planning, 3) decision-making, and 4) problem analysis. Performance was scored on a 1-5 scale with 1 representing not acceptable performance and 5 representing highly acceptable performance. Performance data were analyzed for each dimension as well as for a summed overall performance measure. In-basket materials, dimensions, and scoring keys were simplified from more extensive materials developed and validated by a Fortune 500 company.

Results

Interrater agreement. A randomly selected sample of 67 in-baskets from trial 1 was evaluated by a second assessor. Interrater reliability estimates were .51, .49, .47, .56, and .63 for the dimensions of social flexibility, organization and planning, decision making, problem analysis, and total performance, respectively.

Satisfaction with feedback. It was expected that subordinate satisfaction with feedback would be greater in the participative feedback conditions than in the top-down condition. Further, we tentatively hypothesized that the joint appraisal condition would result in the highest level of satisfaction. These hypotheses were tested using a one-way analysis of variance across feedback conditions. This analysis revealed a significant group difference $F(3,76)=3.831, p<.01$ on satisfaction. In order to examine where these differences occurred, Tukey's honestly significant difference (HSD) test was used. This test revealed that individuals in the simple participative feedback condition were significantly more satisfied with the feedback than subjects in the top-down feedback condition $F(3,76)=2.70, p<.05$. Similarly, individuals who participated in the joint feedback condition were significantly more satisfied with the feedback than individuals in the top-down feedback condition $F(3,76)=2.70, p<.05$. However, no significant differences were found between the private self-appraisal condition and the top-down feedback condition, nor were significant differences found between any of the participative feedback conditions. Means and standard deviations of all attitudinal measures in each condition appear in Table 1.

Perceived accuracy of feedback. It was also expected that perceived accuracy of feedback would be greater in the participative conditions than in the top-down feedback condition and that the joint condition might result in the greatest perceived accuracy. A one-way ANOVA revealed a significant difference between groups $F(3,76)=3.82$, $p<.01$. Tukey's HSD test revealed that subjects in the joint feedback condition perceived the feedback as more accurate than those in the top-down feedback condition, $F(3,76)=6.14$, $p<.05$. No other differences between groups were significant.

Expectations for improved performance. It was suggested that subjects' expectations for improved performance would be greater in the participative feedback condition and that the joint feedback condition might result in the greatest expectation for improved performance. However, a one-way ANOVA revealed no significant differences between feedback conditions.

Performance. Finally, it was hypothesized that actual performance improvements would be greater in the participative feedback conditions than in the top-down or no-feedback condition, and that the joint feedback condition might result in the greatest performance improvements. These hypotheses were tested using a multivariate repeated measures analysis of variance with feedback condition as the between subjects factor, performance by dimensions as the dependent variables, and time as the repeated factor.

A significant time effect was found ($F(1,86)=12.06$, $p<.01$), indicating that subjects performed slightly better the second time than the first time they took the in-basket. A significant condition effect was found, due to initial non-equivalence of groups. However, there was not a significant interaction, meaning that no condition produced substantially greater gains in performance than any other. Means and standard deviations of performance measures in each condition are shown in Table 2.

Discussion and Conclusion

Practitioners have suggested that self-appraisals are a useful technique for structuring participative feedback sessions (Gelbard, Lee, and Lupton, 1983; Teel, 1978), however no systematic studies have thoroughly investigated this idea. The purpose of this study was to experimentally assess the effects of several methods of delivering feedback, including two methods involving self appraisal. Hypotheses about subordinate reactions to feedback and actual performance following feedback were tested under four feedback and one no-feedback conditions. The hypotheses received mixed support.

We first, suggested that subordinate satisfaction would be greater under any participative feedback approach than under the top-down feedback condition. Analyses revealed that of the three participative feedback conditions (simple participative, private self-appraisal, and joint appraisal), both simple participative and joint appraisal conditions produced more subordinate satisfaction with feedback than the top-down condition, suggesting that almost any type of participation may be sufficient to produce subordinate satisfaction. This finding is consistent with past research which suggests that subordinate participation in an appraisal session leads to positive subordinate perceptions.

An unexpected yet interesting finding was that subordinate satisfaction with feedback in the private self-appraisal feedback condition was not superior to the non-participative condition. One explanation may be that subjects felt frustrated that their opinions regarding their own performance were solicited on paper but never referred to again.

The second hypothesis suggested that perceived accuracy of performance feedback also would be greatest in the joint feedback condition, and that all participatory conditions would be seen as more accurate than the top-down condition. It was found that subjects did perceive significantly greater

accuracy in the joint feedback approach than in the top-down approach. Neither simple participative feedback nor private self-appraisal differed significantly from top-down feedback or joint feedback. This result, although not fully supportive of the hypothesized relationship, does follow from previous literature. Landy et al. (1978) found that perceived accuracy of feedback was consistently related to supervisor knowledge of subordinate performance. The joint approach was the only condition that provided a structured upward flow of information. Accordingly, the joint feedback condition resulted in the greatest amount of subordinate perceived accuracy. If the subordinate and supervisor discuss discrepancies that occur in their ratings, misunderstandings regarding subordinate intentions and job requirements can be reviewed and understood. The other participative methods, which did not guarantee a systematic exchange of information, resulted in intermediate levels of rated accuracy.

The final hypotheses stated that expectations for improved performance and actual time 2 performance would be greater for subjects in the participative feedback approaches than in the non-participative conditions. Also, we suggested that the joint feedback condition would provide the greatest increase in these dependent variables. Univariate and multivariate analysis of variance procedures revealed no significant differences across feedback conditions for the dependent variables of expected or actual performance improvements. The fact that actual performance did not improve differentially may be due to unreliability in the ratings of performance. Given the intended objectivity of the in-basket scoring system, interrater reliability was rather low. Another problem encountered in the study was the type of feedback given. Unfortunately, a parallel form of the in-basket was not available, so the same items were used both times. This had the advantage of assuring that changes in performance would be due to feedback condition rather than task differences. On the other

hand, in order to prevent all feedback condition subjects from having perfect scores at time 2, assessors were trained to provide general rather than highly specific feedback. Both feedback and goal-setting experts (Ilgen et al., 1979; Locke et al., 1981) suggest that performance is strengthened by specific support for feedback, therefore specific critical incidents should be included in performance feedback. Since specificity was not possible, it is conceivable that subjects felt role and task ambiguity and were unaware of how to improve their performance.

Overall, the results of the study are mixed. The findings indicate contrary to Hillery & Wexley (1973) but in support of others (Bassett & Meyer, 1968; Cedarblom, 1982; Cummings, 1973; Greller, 1975) that participative feedback does have positive effects. The use of self-appraisal in the feedback interview seems to have enhanced the effects of participation for the perceptual variables of satisfaction and accuracy. Kanfer, Sawyer, Earley & Lind (1985) suggest that an upward flow of information, as was provided in this study by the joint appraisal condition, should affect perceptual variables but appears insufficient alone to improve task performance. They further state that both an upward flow of information from subordinate to supervisor and a downward flow from supervisor to subordinated are necessary to effect performance changes. The extent to which such a reciprocal flow of information actually occurred in this study can be estimated by looking at the impact of initial self rating and initial supervisor rating on the final joint ratings made after the performance discussion. The partial correlations between self- and supervisory appraisal and joint appraisal suggest that a reciprocal flow of information did not take place. The high partial correlations between supervisory and joint appraisals with the self-appraisals removed (Mean $r=.83$) and the relatively low partial correlations between self and joint appraisals with the effect of supervisory

appraisals removed (Mean $r = .44$) indicate that the combined ratings were probably not equally influenced by upward and downward information sources.

Future research is needed to test and develop ways of enhancing and encouraging subordinate participation in the performance appraisal process. The use of a self-appraisal may well be a viable method of accomplishing this. However, future studies may extend the present work by investigating longitudinal effects of this type of feedback on performance, allowing for more specific and helpful feedback, and exploring the effect of self-supervisor appraisal discrepancy on reactions to the appraisal process. It may be that self appraisal is unnecessary when superiors and subordinates initially agree on subordinate performance. Self appraisals may be very beneficial if there is moderate disagreement, but conceivably could increase conflict and defensiveness if there is great disagreement.

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Table 1

Means and Standard Deviations of Satisfaction with Feedback by Feedback Condition.

<u>Feedback condition</u>	<u>Dependent Variables</u>					
	<u>Satisfaction</u>		<u>Accuracy</u>		<u>Expectation</u>	
	<u>M</u>	<u>SD</u>	<u>M</u>	<u>SD</u>	<u>M</u>	<u>SD</u>
Top-down	4.82	1.21	3.98	1.19	5.73	0.96
Simple participative	5.72	0.96	4.64	1.84	6.32	0.93
Private Self-appraisal	5.22	0.74	4.98	1.44	6.23	0.64
Joint appraisal	5.72	1.02	5.51	1.32	6.08	0.96

Table 2

Means and Standard Deviations for Performance Across Trials and Feedback Conditions.

		Time 1		Time 2	
Condition	Dimension	M	SD	M	SD
No					
Feedback	Social Flexibility	1.44	0.63	1.56	0.73
	Organization & Planning	2.81	1.05	2.75	1.34
	Decision Making	3.13	1.03	3.19	0.74
	Problem Analysis	2.75	0.86	2.75	0.77
	Total	2.53	0.70	2.58	0.74
Top-down					
Feedback	Social Flexibility	1.45	0.51	1.60	0.60
	Organization & Planning	2.21	0.70	2.90	0.55
	Decision Making	3.05	0.83	3.10	0.91
	Problem Analysis	2.85	0.81	2.95	0.76
	Total	2.51	0.52	2.65	0.47
Simple					
Participative					
Feedback	Social Flexibility	1.79	0.79	2.16	0.90
	Organization & Planning	2.21	0.79	2.32	0.75
	Decision Making	3.00	0.88	3.11	0.81
	Problem Analysis	2.53	0.70	2.79	1.03
	Total	2.38	0.47	2.62	0.59
Private					
Self-Appraisal					
Feedback	Social Flexibility	1.61	0.70	2.06	1.06
	Organization & Planning	2.33	0.49	3.06	0.94
	Decision Making	3.50	0.79	3.44	0.70
	Problem Analysis	2.56	0.70	3.17	1.04
	Total	2.50	0.41	2.92	0.62
Joint					
Appraisal					
Feedback	Social Flexibility	1.61	0.70	1.89	0.83
	Organization & Planning	2.89	1.08	3.22	1.26
	Decision Making	3.22	1.00	3.28	1.02
	Problem Analysis	2.89	1.32	3.22	1.26
	Total	2.69	0.73	2.97	0.85

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Washington, DC 20374-6111

Dr. Brian Usilaner
GAO
Washington, DC 20548

School Management Unit
National Institute of Education
1200 19th Street, N.W.
Mail Stop 17
Washington, DC 20208

National Institute of Mental Health
Division of Extramural Research Programs
5600 Fishers Lane
Rockville, MD 20852

Information Analyst
Center for Studies of Minority Group
Mental Health
Parklawn Building, Rm 11-94
5600 Fishers Lane
Rockville, MD 20857

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Center
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Uniformed Services University of
the Health Sciences
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College of Canada
ATTN: Department of Military
Leadership and Management
Kingston, Ontario K7L 2W3

National Defense Headquarters
ATTN: DPSRSC
Ottawa, Ontario K1A 0K2

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Dr. Robert Archer
Eastern Virginia Medical Authority
P.O. Box 1980
Norfolk, VA 23501

Dr. Janet Barnes-Farrell
University of Connecticut
Department of Psychology
University of Connecticut Research Foundation
Storrs, CT 06268

Dr. Lee Roy Beach
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1107 N.W. 45th Street
Seattle, WA 98195

Dr. Ann Bookman
Radcliffe College
The Mary Ingraham Bunting Institute
Ten Garden Street
Cambridge, MA 02138

Dr. David Bowers
Pensis Likert Associates
Wolverine Towers, Suite 401
3001 S. State Street
Ann Arbor, MI 48104

Dr. Jomills Braddock
The Johns Hopkins University
Center for The Social Organization of Schools
3505 Charles Street
Baltimore, MD 21218

Dr. Vincent Carroll
Applied Research Center
Wharton School
University of Pennsylvania
3508 Market Street, Suite 100
Philadelphia, PA 19104

Dr. Terry Connolly
University of Arizona
Department of Psychology, Rm. 312
Tucson, AZ 85721

Dr. James Coyne
Mental Research Institute
555 Middlefield Rd.
Palo Alto, CA 94301

Dr. Richard Daft
Texas A&M University
Department of Management
College Station, TX 77843

Dr. Randy Dunham
University of Wisconsin
Graduate School of Business
Madison, WI 53706

Dr. Cynthia D. Fisher
College of Business Administration
Texas A&M University
College Station, TX 77843

Dr John Frederickson
Boulton, Beranek & Newman, Inc.
10 Moulton Street
Cambridge, MA 02138

Dr. Meg Gerrard
Iowa State University
Psychology Department
Ames, IA 50010

Dr. J. Richard Hackman
School of Organization
and Management
Box 1A, Yale University
New Haven, CT 06520

Dr. Ronald Heifetz
Harvard University
John F. Kennedy School of Government
79 John F. Kennedy Street
Cambridge, MA 02138

Dr. Wayne Holder
American Humane Association
P.O. Box 1266
Denver, CO 80201-1266

Dr. Daniel Ilgen
Department of Psychology
Michigan State University
East Lansing, MI 48824

Dr. Larry James
Georgia Tech Research Corp.
Administration Building
Georgia Institute of Technology
Atlanta, GA 30332

Dr. David Johnson
Professor, Educational Psychology
178 Pillsbury Drive, S.E.
University of Minnesota
Minneapolis, MN 55455

Dr. Robert Rice
State University of New York at Buffalo
Department of Psychology
Buffalo, NY 14226

Dr. Irwin Sarason
University of Washington
Department of Psychology
Seattle, WA 98195

Dr. Edgar Schein
Sloan School of Management
Massachusetts Institute of Technology
Cambridge, MA 02139

Dr. Benjamin Schneider
University of Maryland
Department of Psychology
College Park, MD 20742

Dr. H. Wallace Sinaiko
Program Director, Manpower Research
and Advisory Services
Smithsonian Institution
801 N. Pitt Street, Suite 120
Alexandria, VA 22314

Dr. Eliot Smith
Psychology Department
Purdue University
West Lafayette, IN 47907

Dr. Harry C. Triandis
Department of Psychology
University of Illinois
Champaign, IL 61820

Dr. Anne S. Tsui
Duke University
The Fuqua School of Business
Durham, NC 27706

Dr. Andrew H. Van de Ven
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